

UK Foreign Secretary Visits Syria, Marking First Diplomatic Trip in 14 Years

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British Foreign Secretary David Lammy visited Damascus on Saturday, meeting with Syria's interim President Ahmad al-Sharaa in a significant step toward re-establishing diplomatic relations between the UK and Syria after more than a decade of conflict and political rupture.

The meeting marks the first official UK diplomatic visit to Syria since the outbreak of the civil war in 2011 and the fall of long-time Syrian President Bashar Assad last December. Lammy's trip signals renewed engagement with Syria's new leadership, led by al-Sharaa and his Hayat Tahrir al-Sham alliance, as the country begins a fragile post-war recovery.

According to the Syrian presidency, discussions between Lammy and al-Sharaa centered on restoring bilateral ties, enhancing cooperation, and addressing regional and international developments. Lammy also met with Syrian Foreign Minister Asaad al-Shibani, according to Syrian state media.

The UK Foreign Office said the visit demonstrates London's support for Syria's efforts to stabilize its economy, pursue inclusive political reforms, and seek justice for victims of past government abuses. The British government announced a £94.5 million (\$129 million) aid package to support humanitarian needs, chemical weapons decommissioning, and long-term recovery efforts, including education and livelihood programmes

Britain also reaffirmed its commitment to preventing a resurgence of the Islamic State (IS) group, which once held significant territory in Syria and Iraq before its territorial defeat in 2019. The UK's aid package is also expected to bolster regional security and address irregular migration.

In April, the UK government lifted sanctions on several Syrian entities, including media outlets and government bodies, in a move aimed at aiding reconstruction and normalisation. This followed earlier steps removing restrictions on a range of Syrian banks and oil companies.

Lammy's visit comes days after U.S. President Donald Trump signed an executive order easing American economic sanctions on Syria, fulfilling a pledge to support the new Syrian leadership's rebuilding efforts.

Syria's new administration continues to navigate the complex task of post-conflict reconstruction after nearly 14 years of war that left half a million people dead and much of the country in ruins. In recent months, President al-Sharaa has engaged in diplomatic outreach, including visits to oil-rich Arab states and France. Following his Damascus visit, Lammy - travelled to Beirut for talks with Lebanese President Joseph Aoun. They discussed border security, with Aoun announcing plans to deploy more troops along the Israeli border, ensuring only the national army and UN peacekeepers remain armed in the region.